

**Archaeological Survey of the Schneider Tract,  
CenTex Properties, Western Bexar County,  
Texas**

**by**

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**Submitted to  
Frost Geosciences  
Helotes, Texas**

**Report No. 35  
Abasolo Archaeological Consultants  
San Antonio, Texas  
2006**

## **ABSTRACT**

The 128-acre Schneider Tract was surveyed in April 2006 by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, working with Frost Geosciences. The tract is owned by CenTex Properties (San Antonio) and is scheduled for development in the future. The entire tract was examined on foot by a 3-person survey team. One new archaeological site was recorded. It is a burned rock midden, designated as site 41BX1680. Over the rest of the property, there is widely scattered fire cracked rock and occasional flakes or artifact fragments of chert. None of these were time-diagnostic. It is suggested that much of the Schneider Tract was used for short-term, intermittent plant gathering and processing in the uplands. No further archaeological research is necessary.

## INTRODUCTION

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archeological survey of the 128 acre Schneider Tract on April 27, 2006. The survey team consisted of Harry Shafer, Thomas Hester, and Steve Frost of Frost GeoSciences. The survey was conducted for CenTex properties under the aegis of Frost GeoSciences of Helotes, Texas. The 11% surface assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the significance of any cultural resources for nomination to National Register of Historic Places.

The Schneider Tract is a long, rectangular property north of Galm Road and west of FM 1560 (Figs. 1 and 2). It borders Galm Road on the south, and consists of both farmland and pasture. A little more than 50% of the property was in cultivation and the remainder is wooded pasture. The pasture is presently covered with oaks and dense stands of juniper and underbrush. The abandoned buildings of the Schneider farmstead are located in the approximate center of the property. This complex consists of the farmhouse, two barns, a shed, and an elevated water tank. Descriptions of these structures are provided in more detail below.

Soils in the northern section are generally shallow and are of the Tarrant-Brackett association overlying Austin chalk. Lewisville soils dominate the southern section (Taylor et al., 1991). The deeper Lewisville soils were mostly located in the cultivated portions of the property, while the rocky Tarrant-Brackett soils were mostly relegated to pasture lands.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### **Local chronology and site types**

Useful overviews of the prehistory and early history of northern Bexar County can be found in the study by McNatt et al. (2000) of the archaeology of nearby Government Canyon State Natural Area.

Overall, nearly 1700 archaeological sites have been recorded in Bexar County, including many in northern Bexar County. These span 11,200 years of human occupation of the region, from the late Ice Age into the Historic era. The archaeological record has been divided into four major time periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Late Prehistoric and Historic (cf. Hester 2004).

The earliest sites are Paleoindian, recognized around 11,200 years ago. This begins in the late Pleistocene (Ice Age) with the Clovis and Folsom cultures hunting animals that are now largely extinct (mammoth, ground sloth, camel, native horse, large buffalo, etc.). They used distinctive fluted spear tips (Turner and Hester 1993) that can be used to date sites of this era. By 10,000 years ago, the Ice Age had ended, and the climates and landscapes approached those of modern times. During this "Late Paleoindian" time

frame, regional cultures switched to a sequence of non-fluted, lanceolate spear points. Among the important Paleoindian sites in northern Bexar County are Pavo Real (Collins et al. 2000) on Leon Creek and the Chandler site on Culebra Creek.

By 8500 years ago, the Edwards Plateau area had seen a considerable expansion of population, with increasing dependence on plant-food gathering and processing. This time period in Texas antiquity is known as the Archaic and encompasses a broad range of hunter-gatherer cultural patterns that lasted until about 1500 years ago. In the regional chronologies (Hester 2004), the Archaic is divided into Early, Middle and Late sub-periods. Abundant evidence of Archaic peoples is found in northern Bexar County. At the Culebra Creek site (41BX126; Leach and Bousman 2000), excavations demonstrated that, during the Middle Archaic, regional Native American groups began the intensive processing of plants such as sotol, utilizing an earth oven technology that led to the accumulation of the so-called “burned rock middens.”

In addition to burned rock middens and campsites along today’s streams, the Archaic Period is also characterized by numerous time-diagnostic dart point types (Turner and Hester 1993), hafted to spears that were thrown with the *atlatl* (spearthrower). Abundant evidence of flint-working is found, along with chipped stone tools of various sorts and ground-stone grinding slabs used in plant processing. The sheer volume of cultural remains found in many of these sites make them highly susceptible to “pot-holing” – uncontrolled digging by relic hunters.

The Late Prehistoric begins around A.D. 700 with the introduction of the bow and arrow into central Texas. Tiny arrow points of flint were used to tip the arrows, and these are easily distinguished from the Archaic spear points of earlier times. By A.D. 1300, the area was occupied by peoples of the Toyah Horizon. These were probably local Native American groups who adopted the “tool kit” of buffalo hunting – Perdiz arrow points, beveled knives, end scrapers and bone-tempered pottery. These native peoples were first encountered by 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish expeditions, and many of them later went into the Spanish missions in San Antonio. This marks the early part of the Historic era, during Spanish Colonial times. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lipan Apaches and Comanches began to move into the area, adding to the disruption of indigenous cultures begun by the Spanish.

In northern Bexar County, there is a rich record of early Anglo-European occupation – ranches, farms, and substantial stone houses. One example, on Culebra Creek, of the Historic cut-limestone homes has been recorded as 41BX711. The house (built perhaps in the 1840s) and associated ranch-related materials are situated on a low ridge that parallels the west side of Culebra Creek (Hester and Shafer 2005).

### **Local archaeology**

The Schneider Tract is located on uplands drained by Government Canyon Creek, a major northern tributary of Culebra Creek. The Culebra Creek valley has a well documented prehistoric record extending back to at least 10,000 years. The State of Texas Archeological Site Atlas shows that three archaeological sites, 41BX708, 711, and

712 are located along the south side of Culebra Creek upstream from the confluence with Government Canyon Creek approximately 1.5 kilometers west of FM 1560. Site 41BX708 has recently been partially excavated (by the Southern Texas Archaeological Association), and contains an archaeological record extending from early Historic Period times to about 10,000 years ago during Late Paleoindian times. Site 41BX1629, a Middle-Late Archaic site, is located just below the confluence of Government Canyon Creek with Culebra Creek. Two archaeological sites were recorded in 1986 by C. K. Chandler (Texas Archeological Site Atlas) on the opposite side of Culebra Creek from 41BX1629. Both sites are characterized by burned rock middens. Finally, the excavations at site 41BX126, located where Loop 1604 crosses Culebra Creek, revealed that it was extensively occupied from about 2,000 to 5,000 years ago.

Subsequent to the Schneider Tract survey, the authors (Shafer and Hester 2006a) recorded two open campsites, probably used intermittently through the Archaic Period, along Government Canyon Creek southwest of the Schneider Tract. These are 41BX1676 and 1677.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

For discussion in this report, the property was divided up into five reference units; the south field, south and north midfields, north pasture, and north field (Fig. 2). Findings in each of these areas are described below.

South Field: This unit has been recently plowed and planted (Fig. 3). Rains had made it ideal for surface inspection. The surface in the southern portion was littered with limestone cobbles and Uvalde gravels. Traces of expedient quarrying of the Uvalde cherts were noted in the form of a crude biface, a round-based biface fragment (possibly the distal end of a small celt) (Fig. 4A), a few hard-hammer flakes, and two sequent flakes. The limestone and chert diminished in frequency northward toward the middle of the field, but exfoliated Austin chalk became common in the northern and western portions of the field. A biface fragment (Fig. 4B), possibly a broken point, was found at the north end amongst a few fire cracked rock, and two sequent flakes were found along the western portions of the field. While fire-cracked rock occurred sporadically throughout the field, no clusters, concentrations or definite hearth areas were present.

Between the south field and mid fields is the south-facing Historic homestead. It is a pier and beam four room wooden structure with a brick chimney coming from an interior room (Fig. 5). It is a bungalow style with a metal standing seam hipped roof. The style dates to about 1920-1940; no board and batten or square nails were present.

A large shed is located about 60 yards to the southeast, and an old barn is located about 135 yards to the northwest. Another smaller shed is located about 50 yards behind the house. A wooden cistern 30 yards west of the house was constructed on a high stand provided gravity fed water to the house. Numerous historic artifacts were located around the house, including an abandoned Chevrolet Camaro, vintage farm implements and

equipment, a hay hook and a scythe in an old barn, a workable Case tractor, an abandoned vintage Case tractor, among other things.

In the southern mid field a few scattered fire cracked rock and a biface retouch flake, but no concentrations of fire-cracked rock to indicate even a displaced hearth were noted. Also, chert does not occur naturally in the limestone formation outcropping on the property. The source of chert is Uvalde Gravels which were only observed in the southern field.

In the south and north midfields widely scattered fire-cracked rock was observed, but no chert artifacts were seen. A notable cluster, but no concentration, of fire-cracked rock was noted in the southwestern portion of the north mid field (Fig. 6).

The northern field (Fig. 7) was much the same as the mid fields in that widely scattered fire-cracked rock was observed, but here again, no clustering that would indicate a dislocated hearth feature. No chert artifacts were observed in this field.

The northern pasture was a forest mixture of oak, juniper, and mesquite (Fig. 8). It was in the northern pasture that the most significant find was made. This is burned rock midden designated as 41BX1680 and is described below.

#### **41BX1680**

This is a large, shallow burned rock midden, with the central part located at 526638E, 3267850N. The midden deposit was composed of very dark ashy soil and extensively fractured fire-cracked rock (Fig. 9). No diagnostics were found but at least two pieces of chert were observed amongst the rock and ash. The midden measures roughly 30-40 meters east-west, and about 20 meters north-south. We estimate the depth to be about 30 cm at most. It appears to be undisturbed. The antiquity of the midden could not be ascertained on the basis of diagnostic artifacts. However, the extensive degree to which the rocks were reduced in size by firing and the concentration of ash and ashy soil suggests a Late Prehistoric feature. A similar but much smaller burned rock midden in northern Bexar County has been reported by Shafer and Hester (2006b).

#### **Wooden Wagon**

In the woods just west of the north midfield was a small, low shed that was used for storage of old, discarded auto parts. Next to the shed was a very old wooden wagon partly covered with pressed tin siding. The wagon had been in place for a very long time (Fig. 10) and it undoubtedly dates at least to first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century -- if not earlier. There was also a mixture of historic trash, all appearing to be of later age, west of the wagon.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the upland areas encompassed by the Schneider Tract, the survey party was surprised to see a wide scatter of fire-crack rock in each field and pasture, and at various eroded areas of some farm roads. Flakes and chipped stone artifact fragments were indeed rare, but not absent. No diagnostic stone tools or points were found, but there is little doubt that the landscape had been used many times by populations camped nearby, probably along Culebra Creek to the south and Government Canyon Creek to the west. The widespread, but not concentrated (e.g., site-level aggregates) fire cracked rock and stone artifacts, reflects intermittent and short-term use of the uplands for plant gathering and hunting, along with some processing (hearths, earth ovens). At 41BX1680, there is a wholly different picture. A burned rock midden was present, reflecting much more intensive earth oven cooking of plants.

We do not think that further archaeological research is necessary at the Schneider Tract. The only site is 41BX1680, and it is shallow and rather poorly defined, and it would be highly unlikely that further work there would be pertinent to research problems involving this type of site (Black et al. 1997).

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## Figures

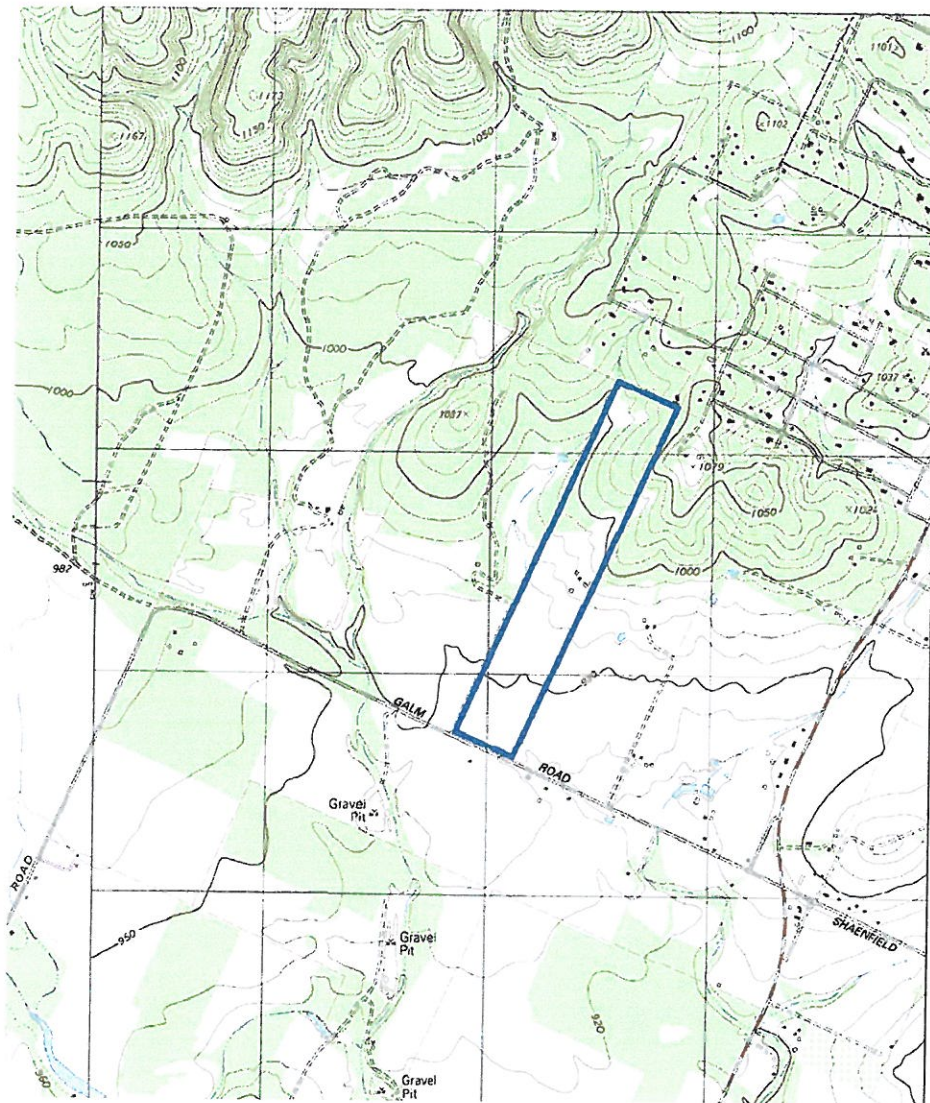


Figure 1. Topographic map of the Schneider Tract. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



## IMAGE RESTRICTED



Figure 2. Aerial image of Schneider tract showing location of the five reference units (south field, south and north mid field, north pasture, and north field) and site 41BX1680. Aerial image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 3. South Field, Schneider Tract.

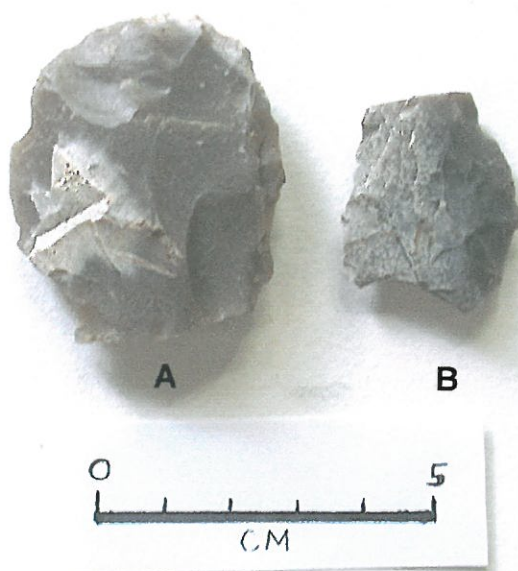


Figure 4. Small celt (A) and medial fragment of a projectile point (B) from the south field of the Schneider Tract.



Figure 5. Two views of the Schneider farm house.





Figure 6. North mid field, Schneider Tract. A notable cluster of fire cracked rock was seen in the field to the left of person walking.



Figure 7. North field at the Schneider Tract.



Figure 8. Two views of the north pasture, Schneider Tract.





Figure 9. Site 41BX1608; note ash and burned rock in bottom view.





Figure 10. Two views of an abandoned wagon in north pasture at the Schneider Tract.